



REVENUE FORECASTING COMMITTEE

Appendix F

Historical Background and Methodology of Maine's Revenue Forecasting Process

APPENDIX F

Historical Background and Methodology of Maine's Revenue Forecasting Process

History

The Revenue Forecasting Committee was established by Governor John R. McKernan, Jr. on May 25, 1992 by Executive Order 14 FY91/92 in order to provide the Governor, the Legislature, and the State Budget Officer with an analysis and recommendations related to the projection of General Fund and Highway Fund revenue. Its creation was in response to a recommendation by the Special Commission on Government Restructuring. Committee membership originally included the State Budget Officer, the State Tax Assessor, the State Economist, the Director of the Office of Fiscal and Program Review, and an economist on the faculty of the University of Maine System selected by the Chancellor.

The original Executive Order called upon the Revenue Forecasting Committee to submit recommendations for State revenue projections for the upcoming fiscal biennium, as well as adjustments to current biennium General Fund and Highway Fund revenue estimates. In accomplishing its task, the Committee was directed to utilize the economic assumptions developed by the Consensus Economic Forecasting Commission.

In 1995, Public Law 1995, c. 368 enacted in statute the Consensus Economic Forecasting Commission and the Revenue Forecasting Committee, adopting both the structure and the intent of the original Executive Order.

Public Law 1997, chapter 655 enacted a number of changes to Title 5, chapter 151-B. There were three major changes: first, the revenue projections developed by the Committee would no longer be advisory but would be used by the Executive Branch in setting budget estimates and out-biennium forecasts; second, the State Budget Officer was empowered to convene a meeting of the Committee to review any new data that might become available; and third, the Committee was expanded from five to six members, with the sixth member being an analyst from the Office of Fiscal and Program Review designated by the Director of that office.

Public Law 2001, chapter 2, enacted a further change to the appointment process of the sixth member making that appointment less specific by requiring that member to be non-partisan staff appointed by the Legislative Council.

Methodology

Both the General Fund and the Highway Fund revenue projections are actually an aggregation of several individual revenue source forecasts. For the General Fund, many departments and agencies collect revenue under different authority. Highway Fund revenue, although more limited in the number of sources, also has multiple revenue sources. Since each of these individual revenue sources is distinctly different in terms of

size (and thus relative importance to total revenue) and factors that influence growth (such as tax law, economic growth, interest rates, size of lottery jackpots, number of patrolmen, etc.), the Committee uses different approaches for evaluating various revenue source forecasts.

In order to ensure that the Committee's review process is as efficient and effective as possible, it divides its revenue line review into three parts:

- Major revenue sources directly tied to economic activity
- Major revenue sources tied to other "non-economic" factors
- Minor revenue sources

Major revenue sources tied to economic forecast

In general, major revenue lines directly tied to economic activity are forecast using econometric equations. These equations define a mathematical relationship between historical revenue growth and relevant economic trends, then project revenue growth based on the defined relationship and expected future performance of the economic variable chosen. For example, revenues derived from the collection of individual income tax are very closely tied to growth in Maine personal income. Thus, an equation is estimated that defines income tax revenue in terms of personal income (and other relevant variables), then the forecast of personal income growth in Maine is used to estimate future income tax collections. The Revenue Forecasting Committee then reviews the equation, the underlying economic assumptions, and the overall revenue forecast level to ensure that they are logical and plausible given our knowledge of current economic conditions and revenue growth. It is the Committee's understanding, and truly the spirit of "consensus forecasting", that model results need not be blindly accepted and should be closely examined.

Maine Revenue Services is instrumental in the development of the forecast for the major taxes, the major revenue sources tied to economic activity. The Research Division maintains the econometric models that are used to develop the forecast. Maine Revenue Services also has access to a tax "data warehouse" in order to query tax data and refine the model outputs and equations. The economic variables forecast by the CEFC are fed into the models.

Major revenue sources tied to "non-economic" factors and Other Minor Revenue Sources

Both the major revenue sources tied to other "non-economic" factors and the other minor revenue sources are generally prepared by the department or agency responsible for collecting the particular revenue stream. Their experience with and expertise in tracking revenue growth is used in place of an equation to project future revenue activity. For example, the level of participation in Maine's lottery is not easily or clearly tied to any particular economic indicator, like income or employment. Revenue derived from lottery ticket sales can, however, be projected based on past lottery sales, the likelihood of a large jackpot occurring within a twelve month period and planned changes in product

mix or marketing strategy. Therefore, the Department of Administrative and Financial Services reviews past lottery trends and evaluates any changes in marketing strategy and estimates the lottery's revenue performance over the upcoming biennium. Additional factors reviewed by the Committee include the projected Cost of Goods Sold and Administrative Expense to arrive at an estimated Net Profit to be transferred to the General Fund. The Revenue Forecasting Committee then reviews their forecast to ensure that their logic is sound and to ensure that this particular line forecast is consistent with expectations for other revenue lines.

To further streamline the review of the hundreds of minor revenue sources, the committee has employed a strategy that has the analysts of the Office of Fiscal and Program Review and the Bureau of the Budget work with the “collecting” agencies to develop the forecast for each of the hundreds of minor revenue sources. This review is particularly concentrated in even numbered years before the beginning of the 1st Regular Session of the Legislature when the biennial budget for the upcoming biennium is first considered. Agencies are required to submit their estimates to the Bureau of the Budget as part of the biennial budget development process in the fall of even number years. Every revenue source is reviewed by the Office of Fiscal and Program Review and the Bureau of the Budget with the agencies for consistency with the economic forecast, historic trends and enacted law changes that may affect future revenue rates, bases or flows.

When preparing a formal review of the biennial budget in odd numbered years to decide if revisions are necessary, the Revenue Forecasting Committee uses a similar, though streamlined, process. The major tax models are re-estimated using any updated economic and capital gains assumptions as well as current baseline data. The budget to actual performance of the other revenue lines is examined by a subcommittee of the Budget Office and the Office of Fiscal and Program Review and, when significant variances exist, the subcommittee recommends to the full Committee which agencies should develop and present new projections for the Committee’s consideration.

Length of Forecast

By statute, the revenue forecast must project revenue for the upcoming biennium and the subsequent biennium. For the start of a biennium, December of even numbered years, this forecast will encompass a span of 5 fiscal years – the current fiscal year, the next biennial budget to be approved in the upcoming legislative session and a projection of the following biennium. This projection for the following biennium was added as a long-range planning tool to help establish a look at the health of the next biennial budget to be developed 2 years later and adopted by a new Legislature. This projection of revenue is combined with projections of expenditures for the General Fund and Highway Fund to develop estimates of the “structural gap” or “structural surplus” of each fund.

Current Tax Law

The Revenue Forecasting Committee bases all revenue projections on current state tax law and other state laws with future effective dates that affect state revenue sources. The

Committee is careful to watch for sunsets and future effective dates of laws that will affect revenue and build those enacted law changes into the forecast. The Committee does not attempt to second-guess how the law may be changed during the upcoming Legislative session. The Fiscal Note Process overseen by the Office of Fiscal and Program Review establishes and tracks the revenue effects associated with legislative changes. These legislative revenue changes are then included in the base revenue forecast. The Revenue Forecasting Committee at its next meeting then adopts or amends those estimates of the legislative revenue changes.

Forecast Schedule

The Revenue Forecasting Committee has 2 statutory reporting dates each year: December 1st and March 1st. The timing of these reports is based on the schedule of the budget process and the Legislature's session schedule. The Governor is required to submit a biennial budget during the first regular session of each Legislature. That process begins in even numbered years with agencies submitting budget requests by September 1st. That process concludes with when the Governor submits his budget proposals to the Legislature by a statutory deadline, the first Friday after the 1st Monday in January (approximately one month later for a newly elected Governor). The revenue forecasting fall forecast begins with the economic forecast by the Consensus Economic Forecasting Commission that must report by November 1st. The December 1st deadline of the revenue forecast provides the Governor with an update of the revenue forecast that the Governor must use as the basis for submitting balanced General Fund and Highway Fund budgets. That 1st forecast of the biennium updates the current projections for the upcoming budget biennium and it provides the 1st projections of the following biennium.

In December of odd-numbered years, the forecast is updated for the next legislative session (the 2nd Regular Session of the Legislature) that begins in January of even-number years. The annual March 1st reporting deadline is scheduled to provide the Legislature with a "mid-session" update so that they might have the most up-to-date forecast for the conclusion of their budget decisions.

